

Alcoholics share stories, laughs

By FRANK MIELE
The Daily Inter Lake

Another big convention was held in Kalispell last weekend, and it was a raucous, wild affair full of the usual bunch of alcoholics that are stereotypically associated with conventions — but with a difference: None of the alcoholics was drinking.

It was the Montana Fall Roundup of Alcoholics Anonymous, held at the Outlaw Inn from Friday night through Sunday noon, and a good time was had by all.

Besides A.A. members, the roundup included representatives of AlAnon (a program for family and friends of alcoholics) and Alateen (for young people dealing with an alcohol problem of their own or in the family). More than 750 people participated.

So why do alcoholics and their families need to hold a convention? It's partly just an extension of the more familiar concept of the A.A. meeting, to help alcoholics stay sober by helping each other.

It's partly a place to learn more about the disease of alcoholism and the traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

And partly, it's just a place to share "war stories" and laughs. As Cliff R., the designated spiritual speaker at the Sunday morning buffet, said, "My God is in this room — because the laughter's here, and we've cried enough.... We've all cried enough, and He wants to hear us laugh."

Well, if Sergeant C. of the television series "Cagney and Lacy" is just learning to cry this season as she struggles with her alcoholism as a new member of A.A., most of the participants at the Kalispell roundup were fully intent on enjoying themselves — and doing it sober, a choice they did not always have.

"Alcoholics Anonymous has provided me with alternatives," Cliff R. said. "Nobody's free unless they have alternatives. A.A. has provided me with an alternative way to live. I don't have to live in pain in any area of my life if I don't choose to. I have an alternative to drinking and I have an alternative to being a jerk.... And that's what freedom is. And that's what A.A. is to me — freedom."

At least one other person was overjoyed that Cliff found his freedom 17 years ago, and that's his

wife Pat R., the Al-Anon guest speaker Saturday.

She called herself a "recovering help-aholic," and explained that an Al-Anon is often someone who enables an alcoholic to drink by protecting him or her from the consequences of their actions.

"He needed me to help him control his drinking, and to keep myself between him and that awful world out there that was out to get him. And I did lots of that," said Pat, who has been married to Cliff for 37 years.

"I began losing track of my choices. I began feeling more and more trapped, and that great, great fear that most of us that come into Al-Anon talk about began setting in...."

"And I just compromised one little principle after another for the sake of peace at any price."

Cliff, Pat and other members of A.A. and related programs maintain their anonymity in order to keep "principles before personalities." Although an individual might slip, the principles of A.A. as embodied in the group's Twelve Step program remain the firm foundation of A.A. sobriety, members say.

And sobriety is the key to life itself for alcoholics. Clancy I., the speaker at the Saturday night banquet, said, "That's the way it is with alcoholics — most of them die drunk."

"Do you want to know what it requires to just die drunk from alcoholism? All you have to do is maintain this idea: 'I know you're trying to help me, and what you say undoubtedly is true for many people, but my case is different.'"

What exactly makes a drinker an alcoholic? No one knows for sure, but A.A. is a fellowship of drinkers who admit that they were "powerless over alcohol" and that their "lives had become unmanageable."

"The bottom line of A.A. —" said Clancy, "the thing that makes the steps viable — is one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic to try to help him break down his feelings of being different, so he will take actions he doesn't yet believe in. And that's what it's all about. And if you do that, you've got someone else getting well."

In Kalispell this weekend, there were hundreds of alcoholics getting well.



Photo By Anne Clark

LARRY MCMILLAN pauses during his stroll through Woodland Park on the new access trail.

Woodland Park project rolls on

The wheels are turning on the Woodland Park Access Project, some 600 lineal feet of asphalt trail giving access to the city's premier park to people previously unable to enjoy it.

The project was the dream of Norm Luellen and DREAM — the Disabled Recreation and Environmental Access Movement. Lewellen, a wood-carving artist, came up with the idea. To get it rolling, he donated a 1-by-6-foot carving titled "1923 Heisler Locomotive" to a fund-raising effort sponsored by DREAM.

With about \$4,000 raised by raffling off the sculpture, the first phase of the trail was constructed late this summer. "We got it done so we can show people," he said.

It was difficult to explain the

scope and the intent of the project, he said, until some of it actually existed. What's completed does not quite finish the first phase of the three-phase project to open up the entire park to the disabled.

The 600 feet of trail connect the parking lots, provide access to the restrooms, and traverse the park lagoon via the two bridges.

Parkgoers are as likely to find on the trail a mother with her baby stroller or walkers simply enjoying a firm path, as they are to find Larry McMillan in his wheelchair. McMillan said he has already enjoyed early-morning turns through the park.

For safety reasons, bicyclists and skateboarders are excluded from the trail, Lewellen said.

Lewellen said trail expansion will include the jogging trail at the north end of the park, something that joggers have encouraged in place of the present wood-chip trail.

He said the cost of the work so far is about \$5,500 — somewhat over the amount raised from donations and from his carving. The Glacier Lions Club, which won the carving, reportedly plans to auction or raffle it off to members, with some of the proceeds to be returned to the project.

Lewellen said he hopes the three phases can be completed by spring or early summer, so the biggest fund-raising push will occur this winter. He estimated the cost to finish the trail system at \$20,000.

Now that it's finally fixed, city's ambulance won't run

Since the Kalispell ambulance was "fixed" by a Ford repair shop, it hasn't been running right, said Fire Chief Duane Larson.

Repairs to the fuel system to remedy a potential fire hazard have apparently caused the ambulance to malfunction, he said. It was running smoothly before the repairs.

Kalispell's ambulance was one of those recalled by Ford Motor Co. when the fuel system on certain models was suspected of causing fires.

Larson took the ambulance to Missoula two weeks ago to undergo modifications designated by the company. A repair shop in Missoula is the nearest one authorized to make the changes.

Since the ambulance returned, it has sporadically died, making it unreliable for emergency use, Larson said. So Tuesday it will go back to the shop.

Larson said he took the ambulance to a local garage but was told any repairs to correct the

engine problem would affect the modifications.

Larson said it appears the city must pay for the modifications done under recall. The bill for replacing the exhaust system, rebuilding the carburetor, replacing fuel caps and ensuring free airflow around the gas tanks came to \$450.

But Larson doesn't think the city should have to pick up the bill for the additional repairs planned for this week.

Whitefish Fire Chief Ric Anderson said recall repairs to the Whitefish ambulance didn't result in mechanical problems but did present a scheduling inconvenience.

The Whitefish ambulance was taken to Missoula for repairs as arranged, but it was learned that replacement parts weren't available yet. Anderson brought his still-faulty ambulance home and only last week returned it to Missoula to have the modifications made.

Since it's been back, Anderson said, "It seems to run real well."

Disappearing building official says family wouldn't move

Wes Lewis, Kalispell's building official for a week, said it was his family's reluctance to move from their home in Goldendale, Wash., that prompted him to leave Kalispell and return to his former job.

In a telephone interview Friday from his Goldendale office of the Klickitat County Building Department, Lewis said, "I guess in every place you see a few things that you'd like to change." But he said if he could have persuaded his family to make the move, he "would have done what was necessary" to make the changes he felt were needed in Kalispell.

Lewis was selected from several candidates to fill the position from which Ken Jackson resigned this summer.

Lewis arrived in Kalispell, without his family, to begin work Sept. 21. The following week he went back to his job as building and fire safety official for Klickitat County.

Asked for his observations about Kalispell, Lewis noted apparent difficulties in enforcing the city's

building codes. He said while it appeared most people follow the department's requirements, non-compliance would be difficult to correct "without any real teeth to the enforcement."

Lewis also noted a lack of office equipment "needed to keep abreast of things." He said, for example, a micro-computer system would be helpful to track property for building activity, zoning history and changes in ownership. "In a place that size, they should have that," he said.

He said fees the department generated could be used to purchase such equipment, instead of being put into the general fund. Lewis said his cursory review of state law showed that all fees should be returned to the building department for administration of the building codes.

Building department revenues for the past several years have surpassed the department's budget, with the surplus going into the city's general fund to pay for other city activities.

Briefly

Youth's arrest nets 2 others

Kalispell police arrested a runaway from Pine Hills School for Boys Sunday at an eastside residence. Officers made two other incidental arrests at the same home.

Officers received information that a boy who had run away from the correctional institution was at a home on Second Avenue East. The boy was found and arrested.

A routine check on other occupants at the house showed one man was wanted for a warrant for burglary. He was arrested, along with a third man. No information was available on charges against the third man.

Westside hearing Nov. 3

The county commissioners voted unanimously last week to hold a hearing on the Westside Zoning District on Nov. 3.

Concerned over the cost of publishing the lengthy and detailed legal description required in the hearing notice, Commissioners Alan Jacobson and Howard Gipe voted late last month to drop the whole project. They changed their minds at the request of residents.

The hearing will be at 8:30 a.m. in the basement of the county commissioners' office in the west courthouse annex.

It is the second of three county zoning districts planned to surround the city. It includes the Foy Lake, Hart Hill and Three Mile Drive areas.

The Willow Glen Zoning District east of Kalispell was established earlier this year. The proposed Evergreen and northside district will wait until next fiscal year because legal advertising of the Westside hearing will deplete the county's budget.

Video business seeks ruling

A video business in Whitefish and a retaining wall in Kalispell will be considered by the Flathead County Board of Adjustment Thursday.

Matthew and Georgene Scotten want permission to use a garage at their home at 623 West Third Street in Whitefish to keep videotapes and do editing. The Scottens have a business videotaping weddings and other events.

Since there will be no additional traffic or walk-in business at the home, the planning office is recommending approval, said Steve Herbaly, planning director. Conditions will put a limit on the size of the business sign and forbid the use of outside employees.

The other item on the agenda is a request by Al Reed of 2113 Mission Trail to build into the setback zone. Reed is building a home on the Mission Village bluff and needs the extra room for wingwall braces on his foundation.

The meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. in the conference room of Courthouse East in Kalispell.

The Scotten request was originally scheduled to go before the board Oct. 6, but a quorum did not appear.

Officers seek boys' attackers

Kalispell police are investigating a reported assault on two boys by older high school students last week.

The boys, ages 12 and 13, said they were attacked while walking home from school at about 4 p.m. near Griffin Field, said Assistant Police Chief Don Hossack.

Hossack said a turquoise Chevrolet pickup carrying several high school students approached the boys and a verbal exchange followed. Some of the older boys got out of the vehicle and held the two victims while one assailant cut their arms with a scalpel-like instrument, Hossack said.

The victims suffered only minor scratches, according to the report. They said they could identify the vehicle and will provide a license plate number to officials if they see it.

Hand-to-Mouth sale bid

Flathead National Forest Supervisor Ed Brannon recently announced that Quiram Logging Co. of Kalispell was high bidder on a 12-million-board-foot timber sale.

Quiram bid \$572,136 on the Hand-to-Mouth Timber Sale in the Tally Lake Ranger District.

Brannon said the sale consists primarily of sawlogs, with the major tree species being lodgepole pine, spruce and larch. The appraised value of the sale was \$169,260.

Telephone hearing called off

By ROGER HOPKINS
The Daily Inter Lake

The Montana Public Service Commission, pleased with the progress that Northwestern Telephone Systems Inc. in Kalispell has made on service complaints, has decided that a formal public hearing will not be required, a staff member reported.

Joan Mandeville, a PSC rate analyst, said the PSC decided Friday that instead of holding a public hearing in Kalispell, this district's commissioner, Howard Ellis, and perhaps some of the PSC staff would attend an upcoming phone company open house. The open house is to call attention to the company's recently remodeled offices on North Main Street (the former Forest Service building) and on First Avenue East (prior headquarters of the entire operation.) It is planned for sometime later this year.

For more than a year, the PSC staff and telephone company officials have been working to resolve customer complaints. "The company has made a great deal of effort to change the company-customer relationship," said Ellis. "We're really pleased with the turn of events."

"Complaints have gone down drastically," said Mandeville. At this time last year, about 55 complaints about the phone company were pending with the PSC. In 1987, that has dropped to about 20, she said.

The complaints the PSC was investigating, Mandeville said, had to do with long waits for new service or for upgrading service from party lines to single lines. She said when the investigation started, there were more than 900 service upgrades pending. That was reduced to fewer than 270 by the end of August.

Other problems had to do with termination of service. Mandeville said a new third-party notification system has been set up. That will help those with vacation homes here who may not have received notices of pending termination of service, and the elderly who may not understand such notices, she said.

Now, a third party concerned about the affected customer's service can be notified if the phone company plans to discontinue it.

But perhaps the biggest improvement, both Mandeville and Ellis said, is in the working relationship with the phone company. For example, an early complaint reviewed by the staff had to do with the phone company not providing enough telephone directories at area motels. "That should not have taken a formal proceeding to resolve," Mandeville said.

Now, she said, many complaints can be resolved by phone, or at least without having to write several follow-up letters to get the phone company's attention.

Regarding the commissioners' decision not to have a public hearing, Mandeville said many people are intimidated by the PSC hearing process anyway. By being available at the open house, PSC representatives hope to learn informally how people view the phone company.

Ellis said at the same time he will be available to hear other concerns about utility service, including energy problems.

City employees accept contract for 1986-1988

Kalispell clerical and public works employees, represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, last week agreed to a contract giving them a 4-percent raise for the 1987-88 fiscal year, retroactive to July 1.

Don Klepper of Missoula, the city's hired negotiator, said the contract is actually a two-year contract, effective from July 1, 1986, through June 30, 1988.

Klepper and the city filed an unfair labor practice complaint against AFSCME at the beginning of negotiations last year, complaining that the union would not open the entire contract to renegotiation. That action delayed the negotiating process. The city won the complaint through arbitration.

Klepper said the 4-percent salary hike does not include the first year of the contract.

He said major contract changes include allowing the city to create a labor pool of employees from different departments and changes in the grievance procedure.

The contract is expected to be approved by the city council at its next regular meeting Oct. 19.